BEING AND APPEARING IN PEIRCE’S PHILOSOPHY: THE STATUTE OF PHENOMENOLOGY

Prof. Dr. Ivo Assad Ibri
Philosophy Department / PUCSP
mailto:ibri@uol.com.br
[Original in Portuguese. Trans. to English by the author]

Abstract: C. S. Peirce's Phenomenology or Phaneroscopy is a science of what appears to human experience and, according to the author, is the very first science of Philosophy. In this science are founded three categories that not only classify appearances but also, from an ontological point of view, will be linked to the being of reality. Peirce considers Phenomenology one of five sciences that are independent from Logic, being merely conjectural in its claims. This paper will try to show that Phenomenology is a fundamental science that announces in itself the inscription of being as the totality of appearing, configuring once more the Pragmatism method in conceiving the meaning of theories.

* * *

The foundations of Peirce’s Phenomenology were laid in 1902, when he also started consolidating his classification of the sciences. To him, Phenomenology is the first science of Philosophy, having two further parts: Normative and Metaphysical Sciences. There is a clear hierarchy between these sciences in this classification, basing all Philosophy on a science of appearance, i.e., that which appears to every conscience and to which constitutes experience.

Peirce also calls this science Phaneroscopy, and the phenomenon Phaneron, seeking, somehow, to nominally distinguish it from other classical Phenomenologies of Philosophy, as Kant’s and Hegel’s.

On what, therefore, appears, the author states: “by the phaneron I mean the collective total of all that is in any way or in any sense present to the mind, quite regardless of whether it corresponds to any real thing or not.”

1 CP-1.284
Thus, it seems that this science will regard whatever may appear in our conscience as a phenomenon, indistinguishable from imaginary or real worlds, since:

that what we have to do, as students of phenomenology, is simply to open our mental eyes and look well at the phenomenon and say what are the characteristics that are never wanting in it, whether that phenomenon be something that outward experience forces upon our attention, or whether it be the wildest of dreams, or whether it be the most abstract and general of the conclusions of science.²

According to this passage, apart from taking the inner and outside worlds indifferently as objects³, Phenomenology adds the expression experience, greatly expanding this concept.

However, what does Peirce mean by experience? In the words of the author: “experience is the entire cognitive result of living...”⁴ and further: “Experience is the course of life”⁵.

And finally, how do we start practicing this science, what is its method? How do we begin the phenomenological investigative work?

The author states:

The faculties which we must endeavor to gather for this work are three. The first and foremost is that rare faculty, the faculty of seeing what stares one in the face, just as it presents itself, unreplaced by any interpretation... This is the faculty of the artist who sees for example the apparent colors of nature as they appear...⁶

Seeing what’s before our eyes and not interpreting it, apparently an easy issue, is in fact a great challenge: to expunge from our spirit, even if only for a few moments, that kind of intervening intoxication that is interspersed between us and the pure presence of the phenomenon.

Nonetheless, would it be fitting to ask what interest this uninterestedly contemplative experience could have? Aren’t we frequently – and thus hindering such experience – looking to solve problems and, as such, interested in judging the object in front, choosing a way of action – and how could we do it doing away with language?

² CP-5.41
³ Murphey (1993), p.367, also comments on this unique aspect of Peirce’s Phenomenology.
⁴ CP-7.527
⁵ CP-1.426
⁶ CP-5.42
And for practicing this science, Peirce still requires two further qualifications from his scholar:

The second faculty we must strive to arm ourselves with is a resolute discrimination which fastens itself like a bulldog upon the particular feature that we are studying, follows it wherever it may lurk, and detects it beneath all its disguises. The third faculty we shall need is the generalizing power of the mathematician who produces the abstract formula that comprehends the very essence of the feature under examination purified from all admixture of extraneous and irrelevant accompaniments.  

The second faculty required seems to demand from the scholar a capacity to concentrate on specific aspects of the phenomenon. Something in it may spark his or her attention to such an extent that it should remain active throughout, probing for the probable noteworthy occurrence of such thing. Finally, the mathematician’s generalizing capacity is required, certainly in order that the reaping of that noteworthy occurrence obtained by the second faculty be represented overall, in the building of a class of objects with adequate criteria of importance, characteristic of the inner thoughts of Mathematics. In a previous paper I had already identified these faculties as seeing, heeding and generalizing. It will be seen, however, that this generalizing is not really that employed in the building of a categorical judgment but, rather, of conjectural judgments, purely hypothetical with a merely classificatory range. This purely speculative nature of Phenomenology is evident in the words of the author: “phenomenology might rather be defined as the study of what seems than as the statement of what appears.”

It could be acknowledged that it is a simple science: indeed, as such it presents itself, due to its uncommitted stance on categorially factual statements. Nevertheless, the statute of this science becomes problematical when one considers Peirce’s declaration that it does not depend on Logic. On the one hand, how can science be so without basing itself on Logic? On the other hand, it is known that Peirce proclaims three forms of arguments in inner Logic, i.e., Abduction, Deduction and Induction. Would not Abduction be, in effect, that mode of argument that proposes hypotheses, i.e., building conjectural judgments and thus providing a formal support for Phenomenology’s proposals?

---

7 CP-5.42
9 CP-2.197 – my boldface.
Leaving this issue temporarily in abeyance, let us delve into Peirce’s classification of sciences where, similar to Phenomenology, four further sciences do not depend on Logic

... there are but five theoretical sciences which do not more or less depend upon the science of logic. One of these five is Logic itself... This is the last of the five. The first is Mathematics. Mathematics may itself be regarded as an art of reasoning. Perhaps this is not the highest conception of it. But at any rate, mathematics has no occasion to inquire into the theory of the validity of its own arguments; for these are more evident than any such theory could be. The second of the five is that department of philosophy called Phenomenology, whose business it is simply to draw up an inventory of appearances without going into any investigation of their truth. The third is Esthetics... The fourth is Ethics.¹⁰

In this hierarchy, Phenomenology relies on Mathematics, which, in turn, according to the author, is the only science that is autonomous of fundaments, independent from any other science.

While it is advantageous to explore dependency in relation to Phenomenology, Aesthetics and Ethics, which with Logic make up what Peirce classifies as Normative Sciences, for the purposes of this paper we shall focus on the relation between Phenomenology and Mathematics. Under this viewpoint, taking the above passage from the author’s work as a basis, understanding Mathematics as the “art of reasoning” presupposes this art being also employed in Phenomenology, given the latter’s dependence on the former, in spite of phenomenology not delving into an “investigation of its character of truth.” Transitionally, then, one must suppose that the nature of mathematical truths has no resemblance to that of Logic. In effect, the author explains:

Mathematics is not a positive science; for the mathematician holds himself free to say that A is B or that A is not B, the only obligation upon him being, that as long as he says A is B, he is to hold to it, consistently. But logic begins to be a positive science; since there are some things in regard to which the logician is not free to suppose that they are or are not; but acknowledges a compulsion upon him to assert the one and deny the other. Thus, the logician is forced by positive observation to admit that there is such a thing as doubt, that some propositions are false, etc. But with this compulsion comes a corresponding responsibility upon him not to admit anything which he is not forced to admit.¹¹

¹⁰ CP-2.120; my bold type.
¹¹ CP-3.428
Thus, in the author’s view, Logic should address positive truths being, under such assumption, subjected to factual alterity. Therefore, the subordinateness between Logic and Phenomenology occurs from the former to the latter, but the meaning of the conjectural nature of this science is yet to be understood, should it not be characterized by the conjectural nature of Abduction, typical of the hypothetical-argumentative structure of Logic.

It seems that the best solution for this question can be found in the relation between Mathematics and Phenomenology. Both sciences, according Peirce’s classificatory structure of the sciences, are free from objectual reference to a reality. Mathematics conjectures on shapes and relations, drawing from them required consequences. Phenomenology will conjecture on classes of appearances. Its method should derive from Mathematics in an interesting sense, which also includes the contemplative capacity of the mathematician towards his or her own constructions, constituted by what Peirce calls diagrams, a concept extremely close to Kantian schemes.

Interesting pertinent passages can be extracted from the author’s work:

>[All necessary reasoning without exception is diagrammatic. That is, we construct an icon of our hypothetical state of things and proceed to observe it.][12] [A diagram has the advantage of doing appeal to the eye.][13]
The inference act consists... in the construction in the imagination of a diagram type or structural image than it is essential of the state of things represented in the premises, in which, for mental manipulation and contemplation, the relationships that were not noticed they are discovered.[14]

In an earlier paper[15] we explored the question of temporality in heuristic operations of mathematical contemplation, concluding that the condition for enabling the discovery of new mathematical properties was, precisely, the suppression of time in the perceptive conscience. Evidently, this issue is too complex for more than a passing reference in the restricted space of this article. In this connection, it should be noted that one of the characteristics of phenomenological contemplation – that look, devoid of mediations, to

---

[12] CP-5.162 ; my italics.
[14] N-I, p. 149 ; my italics
the phenomenon that Peirce claims as the first faculty of the Phenomenology scholar –
is also the absence of temporal conscience.

Perhaps one could say that Phenomenology borrows its *spirit* from Mathematics, i.e.,
the *abilities* required by the mathematician, *as forms of his creative thinking*, and not its
science, its *models*, understood as such as theoretical structures – they are more suitable
to special sciences, such as Physics, constituting its more adequate and legitimate
language.

What Peirce effectively intends for Phenomenology is an inventoring, taxonomic,
science that will establish three modes of being for phenomena and conscience,
announcing straight away that the modes of the *appearing* in their exteriority will be
categorically the same as the interior mode of *appearing*\(^6\).

By requiring the need for three faculties, *seeing, heeding and generalizing*, one could
say that Peirce is already associating a category to each one of them, i.e., to *firstness, secondness* and *thirdness*.

Let us return to the far from easy *no science at all*\(^7\), the science of *seeing*, just seeing:
to it will be associated the first category, *firstness*\(^8\). In effect, the idea of *first* suggests
a category wherein there is no *other*, i.e., it does not define an experience of *alterity*, or
of any form of conflict.

Thus, in the words of the author, “the idea of First is predominant in the ideas of
freshness, life, freedom. The free is that which has not another behind it, determining its
actions...”\(^9\) And what are, according to Peirce, those elements phenomenally first? The
author states further:

> Among phanerons there are certain qualities of feeling, such as the color
of magenta, the odor of attar, the sound of a railway whistle, the taste of
quinine, the quality of the emotion upon contemplating a fine
mathematical demonstration, the quality of feeling of love, etc.\(^{20}\)

This *quality of feelings* is a *suchness* of conscience, simple in itself, a simplicity assured
by the pure presentativeness of the phenomenon’s qualities. For the conscience that
experiences these qualities free of any mediation, under a purely contemplative state,

---

\(^{16}\) Misak (1991), p.72, comments on the irreducibility of categories in the apprehension of the phenomenon
\(^{17}\) Coined by Fernando Pessoa under the heteronym Alberto Caeiro in *O Guardador de Rebanhos*
[published in English under the title *The Keeper of Sheep*]
\(^{18}\) According to Hookway(1992), p.106, firstness is the category that most lacks clarity.
\(^{19}\) CP-1.302
\(^{20}\) CP-1.304
time does not flow. In it the past is not interposed as remembrance, which would be required for an acknowledgment of experience. Neither does future temporality intervene through the intentionality of a plan or judgment. This is a state of conscience totally immersed in the present. Such mental state, it should be noted again, is fundamentally heuristic and constitutes, as a theoretical theme, one of the points of greatest interest in Peirce’s work. This presentativeness characterized by a time hiatus in the conscience is confirmed in the author’s own words:

… it is plain enough that all that is immediately present to a man is what is in his mind in the present instant. His whole life is in the present. But when he asks what is the content of the present instant, his question always comes too late. The present has gone by, and what remains of it is greatly metamorphosed.\(^{21}\)

When, then, in a contemplative state of apprehending mere qualities in their totality, or better still, in their unity, shall adjudicative, cognitive intentions interfere? Also, and necessarily, shall past experiences, that will break that unit, interfere as well and, further, introduce temporality in the conscience? It is under such a concept of unity and timelessness that Peirce explains the logical concept of feeling, as under the following passage:

By a feeling, I mean an instance of that kind of consciousness which involves no analysis, comparison or any process whatsoever, nor consists in whole or in part of any act by which one stretch of consciousness is distinguished from another, which has its own positive quality which consists in nothing else, and which is of itself all that it is...

… so that if this feeling is present during a lapse of time, it is wholly and equally present at every moment of that time.\(^{22}\)

This analysis of feeling, through the bias of unity and temporality, is also extremely interesting and theoretically promising. Moreover, it announces a rupture in conscience’s time that will provide an investigation on relations between the continuum of objective time and the continuum of subjective temporality.

Nevertheless, unity of conscience relies precisely on the extreme diversity of the phenomenon. Herein lies another extremely important point, characterized by the relations between internal unity and external diversity, both necessarily under the aegis of firstness, i.e., the category of freedom and unconditionality.

\(^{21}\) CP-1.310

\(^{22}\) CP-1.306
As a second category, Peirce invites the philosophy scholar to reflect on the following passage:

We are continually bumping up against hard fact. We expected one thing, or passively took it for granted, and had the image of it in our minds, but experience forces that idea into the background, and compels us to think quite differently.  

The conscience associated with this experience, says Peirce, is that of duality. This is one of the strongest points of the Peircean philosophy: his emphatic analysis of alterity, of the experience of denial. Such a ubiquitous experience in our lives is exemplified by the author:

You get this kind of consciousness in some approach to purity when you put your shoulder against a door and try to force it open. You have a sense of resistance and at the same time a sense of effort. There can be no resistance without effort; there can be no effort without resistance. They are only two ways of describing the same experience. It is a double consciousness.

This experience is also defined by Peirce as brute, being purely reactive in its immediacy. Its individuality is also characterized, the singularity of this reaction. In the words of the author: “a reaction is something which occurs hic et nunc.... It is an individual event...”

This experience of reacting against conscience is, to Peirce, fundamental for determining the self as positiveness in the face of denial. He is explicit when he states: “We become aware of ourself in becoming aware of the not-self”

The Peircean analysis of the internal non-self is very interesting, in the form of the past exerting a kind of compulsion over the conscience: “If you complain to the Past that it is wrong and unreasonable, it laughs. It does not care a snap of the finger for Reason. Its force is brute force.” and further: “the Past consists of the sum of faits accomplis... For the Past really acts upon us precisely as an Existent object acts.”

This internal secondness categorially becomes the correlate of the reaction of the external phenomenon against conscience, similar to the correspondence between

---

23 CP-1.324
24 Idem, ibidem.
26 CP-7.532
26 CP-1.324
27 CP-2.84
28 CP-5.459
internal unity and external diversity, both under the first category. At this point, Phenomenology proceeds along its taxonomic mission.

Thirdness, in turn, will appear as expected, as a mediating category between the first and the second. The generalizing faculty will be precisely the one required to find in the phenomenon its possible general elements. In Peirce’s words: “Thirdness, in the sense of the category, is the same as mediation.”30. The experience of mediation develops as an experience in synthesis, outlining a synthesizing conscience:

It seems, then, that the true categories of consciousness are: first, feeling, the consciousness which can be included with an instant of time, passive consciousness of quality, without recognition or analysis; second, consciousness of an interruption into the field of consciousness, sense of resistance, of an external fact, of another something; third, synthetic consciousness, binding time together, sense of learning, thought.30

While the first two categories are immediacies to the conscience, or rather, do not involve time in their apprehension, the third is typically temporal. In effect, it is exactly this conscience of time that characterizes synthesis and apprenticeship. Peirce states clearly that: “This is the consciousness that binds our life together. It is the consciousness of synthesis.”31, and further: “All flow of time involves learning; and all learning involves the flow of time.”32

Peirce’s scholar will find that the category of thirdness is, indifferentially, also a way of seeing interiority and exteriority. Under an interior point of view it characterized itself as a mediative thought. However, as exteriority, what would correspond to thought and to mediation? For the purpose of maintaining category homogeneity one should adopt a realist approach, accepting universal categories as ontological generalities, i.e., continuous, subsuming facts in the form of nature’s laws. Equally true, however, as a science of appearances, the role of Phenomenology is not to speculate on the reality of these universal categories – such is the role of Metaphysics, the third science of Philosophy.

As can be seen, the step taken by Phenomenology is vast. It seems that that scrutiny of experience occurs naively but, in effect, the practice of this science requires

29 CP-1.328
30 CP-1.377
31 CP-1.381
32 CP-7.536
surrendering the spirit to the phenomenon, having the three faculties proclaimed by Peirce as a guide for the classificatory task of this science.

More than the indifferention between internal and external worlds, the homogeneity of categories will reveal to Metaphysics the consideration that the totality of existence is the totality of appearing, eschewing obscure residues of realities on which only epistemic silence applies, similar to the Kantian thing itself.

Semiotics and Pragmatism have a fertile ground in Phenomenology, on which logic consistency may be successfully sowed. The former, making use of that categorial indifferention between subject and object, can claim for itself an essentially dialogical character, where meaning will be distinguished from reality, not in nature, but in scope: to the realist semioticist will befall the task of supposing that there is an infinity of reality still outside representation, but who will never say that the former is foreign to the latter and will believe that the plough of time and evolution will furrow the fertile and receptive soil of the sign.

From his position, the pragmaticist will see in the phenomenon living thought, ideality depicted as a legitimate expression of interiority’s revelation, be it human or Universal.

In all this, Phenomenology abounds. Difficult, though, is its practice: within a sole spirit there must be present, almost naturally and simultaneously, the talent of the poet who knows, above anyone else, how to practice the no-science-at-all of contemplating, and to do it simply in the timelessness of the present; also, the experience of the scientist, fascinated by the discovery of symmetries and regularities and, therefore, with the mind trained for temporality, for judgment and synthesis that are not produced without time.

To our mind, Peirce possessed these qualities in his soul. Certainly, the deepest understanding of his work requires learning to appreciate, with the same intensity, both poetry and science and to find them again later in the splendid philosophical architecture of this author.

References


